



Australia Vietnam
Policy Institute

AVPI FELLOWS PROGRAM

Transforming the rivers and beaches of Vietnam to a circular future *How can Australia's container deposit experience help Vietnam?*

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Transforming the rivers and beaches of Vietnam to a circular future

How can Australia's container deposit experience help Vietnam?

Brief overview of Australia's Container Deposit Scheme (CDS):

Australia has implemented a Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) across all states and territories, offering a 10-cent refund for each eligible beverage container returned.

On the 1st of May 2025, Tasmania was the last state to introduce the scheme, making it truly nationwide coverage. Under the current scheme, beverage suppliers fund it through a product stewardship model, in which the beverage industry is made responsible for the lifecycle of its products.

The system has various types of collection facilities, reverse vending machines, staffed depots, and over the counter locations. Some collecting glass, paperboard containers, aluminium and plastic with applicable capacities ranging from 150ml to 3 litres.

The scheme has been very successful with return rates in many states above 60%, with South Australia leading the way, reporting a 76% return rate.¹

In addition to the environmental benefits, beverage container litter has been reported to be reduced by up to 73% in some states. It has also created in excess of 2500 jobs nationally and many community groups have raised 100's of millions of dollars.²

The financial incentives per container are small, however, in terms of the individual, this has proven to be a key driver.

Seeing the plastic crisis in Vietnam

One amazing morning in the Mekong Delta, a friend and I had taken a river cruise and a small wooden boat ride, paddled by a happy, smiling middle-aged lady. As we made our way down the narrow waterways, the landscape was simply amazing with palm trees and rice paddies all around us. There were fishermen, quaint little villages and floating markets with various fruits and colourful flowers.

Yet something was not quite right, floating by and caught in the reeds and other vegetation were hundreds of bottles and other plastics. They were bobbing up and down all around us, with unknown volumes submerged, destroying the water environment. I said to my friend, 'This is so sad, such a wonderful place and discarded plastic everywhere.'

I saw the smile disappear from her face as she said, 'I remember what it was like when I was a little girl, my Grandmother's house was not far from here.'

The next day, we continued south to a beautiful island called Phu Quoc in the Gulf of Thailand. The beaches are amazing, beautiful clear water, soft sands, amazing sunsets and incredible views.

Sadly, a walk along the beach tells a different story, with plastic bottles and packaging littering the shoreline, being washed up onto the beach with every wave.

One night, we sat watching some teenagers playing a game of soccer (Football), and as they played, they would simply move the plastic bottles to one side with their feet. I reflected on what I saw and thought that pollution had become part of their daily lives.

Then a light bulb moment: I say out loud, "What if those plastic bottles were worth something?" My friend says, 'What are you talking about?'

I told her about the Australian Container Deposit Scheme and how 10 cents was refunded for every applicable container. The viable difference that is occurring in Australia.

She quickly converted 10 cents to 28 Vietnamese Dong. 'That is nothing to an Australian, but here, well, there is a lot of plastic around'.

I quizzed her on how a village-based collection system may work in the Mekong Delta, Phu Quoc, or the wider Vietnam.

1 Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water;
State EPA websites; Industry reports; Academic research
2 <https://www.australianbeverages.org/initiatives-advocacy-information/container-deposit-schemes/>

Our thoughts were: maybe start with low tech, with community-based cooperatives in rural areas and higher tech options in the bigger centres.

The children playing football on the beach would no longer kick bottles aside; they would collect them. Fishermen would gather the bottles caught in their nets rather than tossing them back into the water. Floating markets could become collection hubs, with vendors earning extra income by aggregating containers from their communities.

It is going to be a long time before plastic bottles cease to exist, maybe never, so the fundamental question is how to stop the plastic bottles from destroying these amazing waterways and beaches. As the sun sank below the horizon, I thought about how powerful small incentives can be, as is the case in Australia.

You can have regulations and large infrastructure projects; however, the most successful approach is a straightforward system with modest incentives.

The Mekong Delta, Phu Quoc and the rest of Vietnam are too beautiful to be drowning in plastic. And perhaps with the lessons learnt from Downunder, they don't have to be. With almost 18 million tourists per year spending an estimated \$35 billion, from an economic perspective, it makes good sense to try, from an environmental perspective cleaning up is a must!

State Scheme Websites

- NSW: returnandearn.org.au
- Victoria: cdsvic.org.au
- Queensland: containersforchange.com.au
- Western Australia: containersforchange.com.au/wa
- South Australia: epa.sa.gov.au
- Tasmania: recyclingtasmania.com.au
- ACT: actcds.org.au
- Northern Territory: nt.gov.au



Peter Dwyer, CEO of Comtest Group, is a business leader focused on expanding the company's testing and compliance services into sectors such as telecommunications, automotive, renewable energy, and consumer electronics.

With 35 years of international business experience, Peter and Comtest group are looking to path the way for them and other SMEs to enter the Vietnamese and broader ASEAN markets, providing comprehensive market entry strategies and insights.

His deep understanding of business development is complemented by his pursuit of a doctoral thesis on "Australian SME Success in Vietnam," reflecting his passion for entrepreneurship and cross-border ventures.

Peter's expertise and commitment make him a key figure in driving his company's growth in emerging markets like Vietnam. Peter has also participated in the Asialink Leader's Program and the Australia Vietnam Green Economy program.



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